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Analysis of Translation of *Mrs. Whitlam* from an Ecological Perspective

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Abstract

Mrs. Whitlam, a novel written by Bruce Pascoe and published in 2016, depicts the relationship between a horse named Mrs. Margaret ‘Maggie’ Whitlam and a young girl, Marnie. With its thrilling storyline, the novel addresses the issues of identity, belonging, racism, Aboriginal histories, family, and horses. In this paper, I analyze the translation from English to Chinese of *Mrs. Whitlam* through the lens of Eco-translatology, an emerging eco-paradigm for Translation Studies. Through a case study that features a linguistic dimension, a cultural dimension and a communicative dimension in Translation as Adaptation and Selection (TAS), this paper explores suitable ways to translate children’s literature.

Introduction

Mrs. Whitlam, a novel written by Bruce Pascoe and published in 2016, depicts the relationship between a horse named Mrs. Margaret ‘Maggie’ Whitlam and a young girl, Marnie. The style and language choices, along with the flowing narrative, convey a thrilling storyline and address the issues of identity, belonging, racism, Aboriginal histories, family, and horses. Through the use of first-person and past tense, the author elaborately conveys the thoughts and emotions of the protagonist, Marnie, in a complex way. While Marnie is a fictional figure, the storyline portraying alienation and reconciliation may be familiar to children who first experience a new environment. This story may strike a chord with younger audiences, due to its familiar plot. In addition to being entertaining, such literary works enlighten and cultivate children’s minds. With the expansion of globalization and cultural exchanges, many Chinese children’s literary works began to be known overseas; at the same time, many literary works translated from other languages have been made available to young readers in China in recent years. Australian children’s literature with its distinctive features always sparks children’s reading interest, despite the linguistic and cultural differences. In order to introduce more Australian literature to young readers in China, the Center for Australian Studies at Inner Mongolia Normal University has commissioned a series of translation works of Australian children’s literature. *Mrs. Whitlam* along with nine other Australian Indigenous children’s fiction works have been translated into Chinese and made a unique contribution by introducing Indigenous history and culture to Chinese readers of all ages. At the same time, the publication of the translation series in the last two years has attracted scholarly attention to Australian children’s literature in China. However, research into this field remains limited.

Great differences exist between adult’s literature and children’s literature in terms of language and plots; as such translation requirements are different. In addition, the number of research studies into the translation of children’s literature to assist the translation practice is very small compared to that in the translation of adult literature. Klingberg points out that a certain deviation from the original text is often found in the practice of translating children’s literature. He argues that translators should attempt to

make few changes to the source text and keep the integrity of the original text as much as possible. Oittinen pays great attention to the relationship between text and illustration (which is different from adult literature) when translating children’s literature. Based on the above-mentioned studies, this paper aims to apply the theory of eco-translatology proposed by Chinese scholar Hu Gengshen to analyze the translation of *Mrs. Whitlam* from the perspective of three-dimensional transformation – namely linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension – to explore a more idiomatic and appropriate way of translating literature for children and young adults.

A brief overview of eco-translatology

In 2001, Hu Gengshen proposed eco-translatology as a new perspective in Translation Studies that covers two fields – translatology and ecology. Ecological perspectives focus on the relationship between the translator and the external environment related to translation and emphasize the connection between translation ecology and the translator’s adaptation. The translation ecological environment specifically refers to “the world constituted by the original text, source language, and target language, namely, the interconnected and interactive whole of language, communication, culture, society, author, reader and consigner” (Hu, *An Approach to Translation* 13).

Translators play a central role and occupy a dominant position in the “translation process” and “translation operation stage” (Hu, *Eco-Translatology* 87). On the one hand, translators should adapt to the multi-factor ecological environment; on the other, as the translator is also a member of the ecological environment, he/she has the autonomy to choose, and the translation is the result of such choices. In other words, “the environment chooses the target text, and the environment restricts the target text,” namely “the relationship between the translator, the translation version and the translation strategy” (Xu 33). In the translation production operation stage, “the translator has been able to reflect or implement the choice of the target text on behalf of the translation ecological environment” (Wei 124). As such, the translator’s selection process includes the equivalence strategy in the linguistic environment and the adaptation strategy in the non-linguistic ecological environment.

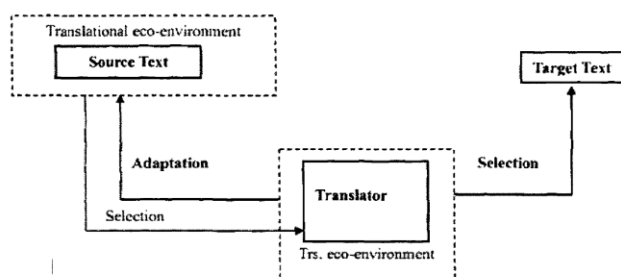


Figure 1. Two stages of adaptation and selection in the translation process (Hu, *An Approach to Translation* 222)

Translation can be defined as follows:

A selection activity of the translator’s adaptation to fit the translational eco-environment; [...] the process of translating is a production of target text by ‘natural’ selection employing the translator’s adaptation to the eco-environment and translator’s selection of both the degree of the adaptation

and decisions about the form of the final target text in terms of the Darwinian principle of natural selection.

(Hu, *An Approach to Translation* 219)

Language, culture, and communication have always been the focus of Translation Studies and usually represent the perspectives from which transformations are made in the translation process. Translators tend to choose appropriate source texts according to different situations and sequences of language, culture, and communication. Although the language, culture, and communication are the key elements in the translation process, other factors need to be considered, such as the author’s social background and the target readership.

The translation of *Mrs. Whitlam* – a three-dimensional perspective

The two-stage adaptation and selection model proposed by Hu (fig. 1) emphasizes language, culture and communication for the translation process. The diagram below details the aspects that underpin the translation of *Mrs. Whitlam*.

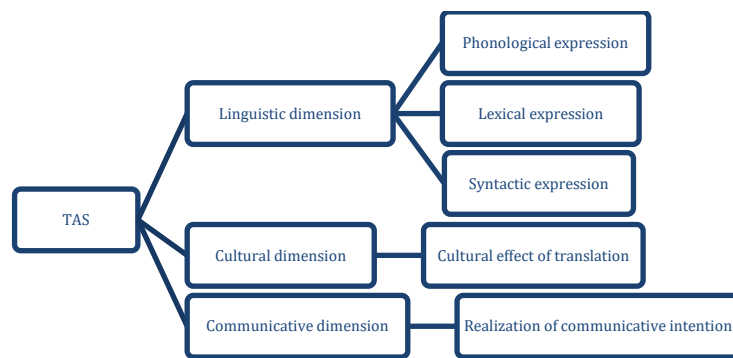


Figure 2. Summary of three aspects of Translation as Adaption and Selection (TAS) adapted from Hu (*An Approach to Translation*)

Transformation from the linguistic dimension

The linguistic dimension transformation refers to the translator’s adaptive selection and transformation of the language forms required at different linguistic levels and in different linguistic aspects. The section below describes the phonological, lexical, and syntactic levels.

Phonological expression

Transformation at the phonological level requires the translator to consider the characteristics of children’s literature, in particular its distinct phonological features, which are in line with children’s thinking characteristics and with adults’ needs to read such works to children (Xu 13). Therefore, the translator of children’s literature should consider “the ability to arouse in the reader the same feeling, thoughts and associations experienced by readers of the source text” (Nikolajeva 28). To fulfill this requirement, the translator should attempt to reproduce the distinctive sound to satisfy the target children’s phonological aesthetic appreciation.

Onomatopoeia is a distinctive feature in children’s literature. While the imitation of vocal sound may not always carry substantial meaning, it stimulates the imagination of the target readers, especially children with acoustic sensitivities. The

examples below illustrate the translation strategies employed to capture onomatopoeia in the target language:

Example 1

This time Maggie was in stride and understood the game. She arched her regal neck and made sure her feet came down on the road like clattering claps of thunder. It wasn't the *clip-clop, clip-clop*, like the nice horses in storybooks. It was the *club-clap club-clap clubbidy-clappity club-clap* like the mighty warrior horse she was. It must have sounded like the detonations of bombs and the boys took off like scared rabbits.

(Pascoe 19)

这一次，马吉泰然自若，明白了游戏规则。她弓起自己高贵的脖子，确定马蹄落地时会发出像雷鸣的声响。她不像故事书中的马，落地发出咯噔咯噔的马蹄声，而是像是一匹强大的战马，发出啪啦啪啦，砰砰砰地声响。这听起来简直像炸弹爆炸一样，这些坏家伙们像受了惊的兔子一样跑了。

In this example, I opted for “咯噔咯噔” and “啪啦啪啦，砰砰砰” to depict the sharp contrast sound between Mrs. Margaret ‘Maggie’ Whitlam, a female Clydesdale and other horses featured in this story. This “mighty warrior horse” makes a powerful footstep sound different from the sound existing in the memories of Chinese children who are more familiar with a common horse than this “heavy fairy horse”. Through such contrast, the vivid picture might be clear for young readers. Maggie’s mighty image has naturally come into existence.

Example 2

I heard his footsteps crunch across the gravel and soon I could hear the broom at work behind the feed shed.

(Pascoe 25)

我听到他踩在沙砾上嘎吱嘎吱的脚步声，很快就能听到饲料棚后面的扫帚扫地的沙沙声。

In this example, I use two typical Chinese onomatopoeic words, 嘎吱嘎吱 and 沙沙, to help young readers visualize the footsteps and the sweeping; and to capture the meaning and form a vivid picture in their mind.

Lexical level

In children’s literature, nicknames with sometimes negative connotations may pose problems for both the translator and the reader. Translating nicknames requires a deep understanding of the source text. *Mrs. Whitlam* is the story of an Indigenous girl from a low-income family living in an environment filled with conflicts and clashes between the rich and the poor. Nicknames can reflect such conflicts and struggles, as the examples below suggest.

Example 3

Stinky Stevenson he was called, ever since he filled his pants in primary school. My brothers reminded him of it every time I told them he'd been teasing me. 'Hey, Stinky, how heavy are ya jocks brah?' they'd call out to him in front of his mates.

(Pascoe 17)

他有个绰号叫臭气鬼，上小学的时候，他很胖，裤子被绷得紧紧的，大家都这么叫他。每次我告诉我的兄弟们史蒂文森又在取笑我，他们就会提醒他，“嘿，臭小子，你这个四肢发达的家伙到底有多重？”甚至会他的同伴面前这样叫他。

Stevenson is a naughty boy who always teases and even bullies Marnie. “Stinky” is the nickname given by other children to describe his characteristics and appearance. Marnie is from a low-income family, lovingly brought up by her parents and protected by her brothers. In the example above, “stinky” appears twice: the former is translated as “臭气鬼” to show Stevenson’s nickname and the latter as “臭小子” to capture Marnie’s brothers’ threatening tone.

Example 4

I trotted away smugly but not before I heard Stinky yell out, ‘Carthorse, carthorse, dark horse, darky’s horse.’

(Pascoe 18)

我洋洋得意地骑马绝尘而去，但还是听到臭气鬼在那里大叫：“笨马，丑马，黑鬼子马。”

In this example, “臭气鬼” Stevenson uses three different nicknames – carthorse, dark horse and darky’s horse – to scold Maggie, the mighty Clydesdale horse. “Carthorse” is not necessarily a derogatory term, but the context suggests that Stevenson uses it to describe a heavy horse as a carthorse. Such specialized horse-related terminology is beyond Chinese children’s comprehension. To address this, I employ more understandable phrases such as 笨马，丑马，黑鬼子马 to make the text more accessible to young readers and help them understand the plot.

Four-character phrases are frequently used in Chinese, and range from literary works to daily conversation. Appropriate use of four-character phrases makes the translation more readable with concise, expressive, and educational text. In English to Chinese translation of children’s literature, four-character idioms convey the source text in a more meaningful way and are most appropriate in the translational environment for young readers in China.

Example 5

My stomach gave a surge as I imagined tying a saddlebag to those rings and riding along the river to swim her. And having a barbecue afterwards. I

couldn't believe it. It was a dream. An incredible dream with me, Marnie Clark, on a horse — and the whole world to ride it in.

(Pascoe 14)

我想象着在那些环上系上个马鞍包，然后骑着她去河里游泳，顿时激情澎湃。然后再来个烧烤。哦，我简直不敢相信。这只是个梦吧。简直是难以置信的梦，玛尔妮·克拉克，居然骑着马——骑着它就好像得到了全世界。

The example above describes Marnie's exciting feeling and wild imagination after she received the gift of her dreams – a perfect horse and a whole set of equestrian equipment. I translated the words “her stomach gave a surge” and “incredible” as “激情澎湃” and “难以置信” to depict her feelings.

Example 6

It felt like I was being pulled under. I took another mouthful of water and coughed and choked. The water bucketed along as it crossed the sandbar into the sea and there was no hope of swimming anywhere.

(Pascoe 61)

沉重的身体仿佛被拖着，拽着到河底。我又被灌了一大口水，呛在嗓子眼里，忍不住开始咳嗽。这里是入海口，河水穿过沙洲流入大海，水流湍急，这个地方根本没办法游泳。

In chapter 12, where this paragraph appears, Marnie saves a boy who is about to drown in the sea. The surrounding environment, especially the fast-moving seawater, makes it challenging for her to save the boy. In the source text, the common word “bucket” hinders the understanding because the real meaning is far away from the basic meaning “水桶” with which Chinese readers may be more familiar. The word “bucket” in this sentence is a verb with the meaning of “bump along”, so it is translated as “水流湍急” to reproduce the meaning and create a visual representation for the reader.

Syntactic level

One of the conspicuous differences between English and Chinese is the syntax. Hypotaxis and parataxis are always discussed in the comparison of the two languages. The former focuses on the grammatical arrangement of the text, while the latter emphasizes the inner logic of the sentence (Ma 112). In English to Chinese translation, reconstructing sentence patterns is always used to adjust to the idiomatic expression in Chinese.

Example 7

You should be proud to have a horse named after that lady — she was a wonderful woman, her old man wasn't a bad bloke either, even if he was Prime Minister. Did a bit for black people too. More than most of them!

(Pascoe 14)

你应该为有一匹以那位女士的名字命名的马感到骄傲——她是一个很棒的女人，她的父亲也不是一个坏家伙，即使他曾经是首相，但也为黑人做了些事情，比大多数的当官的做得都多！

There are three sentences in the source text there, however in my translation I opted for a long sentence to better capture Marnie’s vivid imagination of what her mother, a less educated but insightful Indigenous woman, would say if she wanted to change the horse’s name.

Example 8

She read every word: car accidents, deaths, famous divorces, unlikely marriages, discoveries of half alligator-half humans in the North American Everglades, political and world news. The only thing she wouldn’t read was the business page. What’s the good of reading about money when you got none? Like talkin’ about pancakes when the kitchen cupboards got nothin’ but dead cockroaches and starving mice. She talked like that, my mum.

(Pascoe 15)

她会读完报纸上的每一个字：车祸、死亡、备受瞩目的离婚、看似不可能的婚姻、北美湿地发现的半鳄鱼半人类、政治和世界新闻诸如此类，唯一不想看的就是商业版。当你没有钱的时候读钱有什么好处？就好像厨房的碗柜里除了死蟑螂和饥饿的老鼠什么也没有的时候去谈论煎饼，没有任何意义。我妈妈，她总是会说这么有道理的话。

Example 8 is also a vivid description of Marnie’s mother, a far-sighted housewife. The paragraph in the source text consists of five sentences while the target text contains four. I therefore combined the first two sentences to make a sharp contrast within one sentence to impress readers deeply; and I changed the word order in the last sentence, “She talked like that, my mum” into “我妈妈，她总是会说这么有道理的话” to show that the daughter is proud of her mother.

Transformation from the cultural dimension

Culture is another crucial aspect of translation and can influence or even constrain translation to a certain degree (Munday 127). The purpose of translation is to render a source text into a target language, but also to introduce a foreign culture to the domestic readers. Literary translation can keep the style of original language and culture better, but in some cases, lack of language equivalence may hinder the readers’ understanding of the original context. In such cases, literary translation accompanied by annotation would be a suitable choice. Such a combination of translation methods is also in line with Hu’s suggestion to “not only pay attention to the cultural transformation of the source-text language, but also to adapt the entire cultural system [...] to which the language belongs and, in the translation process, to pay attention to the transmission of the connotation of bilingual culture” (*An Approach to Translation* 136).

Example 9

‘I heard that,’ Aunty said as she walked onto the verandah. ‘It’s eleven o’clock in the morning!’ ‘No, it’s not, it’s the eleventh hour.’ The wizened and buckled little man winked at me.

(Pascoe 52)

“听到了，”阿姨边走边说。“现在才早上十一点！”
“不，不是，这可是最后关键一刻了*。”这个满脸皱纹的矮个男人向我眨了眨眼。

This conversation takes place between Aunty Veronica and Uncle Binny in chapter 10. Uncle Binny is a humorous older adult who likes to make jokes with his wife, Aunty Veronica. In this conversation, Aunty uses “eleven o’clock” while Uncle uses “the eleventh hour” intentionally because the latter is a biblical allusion and has a totally different meaning. The biblical allusion is commonly used in various literary works. To make such references more accessible to young readers in China, I added the following literary translation and annotation in the footnote:

*the eleventh hour: 这句成语出自圣经的《马太福音》。在古时候，犹太人将白昼分为 12 个小时。有个阔人想雇几个人到他的园子里去干活，他从早上五点就开始雇人，雇到最后一个人时已经是夜里很晚了。干完活后付工钱，结果大早上来的和夜里来的都一视同仁地得到了一枚银币，弄的一大早就开始干活的人极为不满，早知如此，还不如夜里十一点钟来呢，因为只要不超过十二点，都能得到同样的报酬。很像中国的一句谚语：来的早不如来的巧。

Back-translation: This idiom comes from the Gospel of Matthew in the Bible. In ancient times, Jews divided daylight into 12 hours. A rich man wanted to hire some men to work in his garden. He had been hiring since five o’clock in the morning, and it was late at night when the last man was hired. Those who came early in the morning and those who came at night were equally rewarded with a silver coin. Those who had begun their work early in the morning were very dissatisfied. They might as well have come at eleven o’clock, for they would have been paid equally if they had not gone past twelve. Much like a Chinese proverb: It is better to come coincidentally than to come early.

Example 10

I unsaddled her beneath a great banksia, which bowed down low into the bowl of a sand dune and made a perfect picnic grove.

(Pascoe 47)

我把马吉牵到一棵山龙眼树*下卸下了马鞍。

The translation of proper nouns of plants and animals may be dealt with in different ways. Here, I choose “山龙眼树” with a footnote annotation, to render the translation of Banksia, a unique plant which can be found in Australia.

*Banksia 是澳洲著名的代表性植物之一，仅在澳洲大陆自然生长。其品种有近 80 个，颜色有黄、橙、红、粉、褐、灰、白色等很多种。

Back-translation: Banksia is one of the famous representative plants in Australia, which only grows naturally in the Mainland of Australia. It has nearly 80 breeds and the colors are yellow, orange, red, pink, brown, gray, white and so on.

Transformation from the communicative dimension

Communicative dimension refers to ways in which communicative intention of the original text has been conveyed or achieved in the target language. According to Zhang (1998), there are two types of intentions: overt and covert. Overt intentions are those that are clearly presented without the reader’s speculation, while covert intentions refer to implications that are hidden behind the original text. Two examples that capture such intentions are presented below.

Example 11

I knew I was going to have to let go of the baby and the thought of the mother’s eyes froze my heart. I was going under, pulled down by the turbulence, the dead weight of the baby and my own exhaustion when I felt something beside me.

(Pascoe 61)

我知道可能得放手了，否则我们都无法生还，可一想到那位母亲心急如焚的眼神，我就无法做出这样的决定。此时我正在一点一点往下沉，周围的湍流，孩子的重量和自己的精疲力竭，所有这一切仿佛变成了一只巨大的手将我拖下河底，此时我能感觉得到有什么东西正在靠近我。

The underlined words in this example constitute an overt intention, as it captures the anxiety in the mother’s eyes. As such, I translated the terms as “那位母亲心急如焚的眼神” to help the young readers gain a better understanding of the mother’s feelings.

Conclusion

Based on the eco-translatology proposed by Hu, in this paper I analyze the translation practice from three dimensions – linguistic, cultural, and communicative. In my translation of this novel, I used different translation methods to adapt to the translational eco-environment, hoping that young readers in China gain a better understanding of the source culture.

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